

STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

DOCKET NO. 1998-650

SEPTEMBER 1, 1998

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
Inquiry into the Readiness
of Public Utilities in Maine
for Year 2000 Issues

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

WELCH, Chairman; NUGENT, Commissioner

I. SUMMARY

The Commission wishes to ensure that public utilities in Maine are prepared for Year 2000 issues. By this Notice, we open an inquiry, pursuant to Chapter 110 §§ 1201-1206 of the Commission's Rules, into the readiness of Maine's public utilities for these issues.

II. BACKGROUND

Many computer applications and embedded systems may have difficulty recognizing dates after 1999, a problem commonly referred to as the "Year 2000," "Y2K," or the "millennium bug" problem. Most public utilities use these systems for operational and support activities, raising concerns that some utility services may be impaired by these problems in the future.

On June 1, 1998, the Commission asked most Maine public utilities to certify to the Commission "that the utility will be 'Year 2000' compliant and that there will be no service interruptions as a result of noncompliance after December 31, 1999." The Commission asked that each certification be signed by a utility officer and returned to the Commission's Administrative Director by June 30, 1998. The Commission also requested utilities to respond to seven related questions in its request, a copy of which is attached to this Notice.

The Commission received responses to its query from more than 100 utilities. The Commission Staff has reviewed these responses, and has observed that not all utilities have reported the same degree of readiness.

We wish to ensure that public utilities in Maine are as prepared as possible for Year 2000 issues. The responses we have received do not reassure us that all Maine utilities have taken all prudent assessment and testing measures related to these issues. Further, because of the large number of computer applications and embedded systems in use by some utilities, even well-prepared utilities may experience minor failures in some elements of their systems. We wish to ensure that all utilities have developed prudent contingency plans for interrupted or impaired utility services that may result from random Year 2000 failures. We are especially concerned that utility plans consider possible interruptions of services provided by other utilities (e.g., electric and water utility SCADA systems dependent on the public switched telephone network, and remote telecommunications and pumping facilities dependent on commercial power).

This inquiry will serve as a vehicle for us to collect information from potentially-affected utilities and others to help us assess Maine utilities' degree of readiness for possible Year 2000 failures. This inquiry will also enable us to determine whether any grounds exist for us to conduct a subsequent formal investigation into any aspect of these issues.

As part of this inquiry, we will invite (under separate cover) senior representatives of Maine's largest public utilities and other related organizations to describe to us briefly the state of their readiness for Year 2000 events and related contingency plans. We have scheduled a conference for that purpose on October 21, 1998, and will determine what further action we may need to take, if any, based on information we receive at that conference.

III. ORDERING PARAGRAPHS

Accordingly, we order:

1. An inquiry be initiated into the readiness of all public utilities in Maine for Year 2000;
2. The Administrative Director to provide notice of this inquiry to all public utilities in the State of Maine; and

3. The posting of notice of this inquiry on the
Commission's world wide web site:

<http://www.state.me.us/mpuc>

Dated at Augusta, Maine this 1st day of September 1998.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

Dennis L. Keschl
Administrative Director

COMMISSIONERS VOTING FOR: Welch
Nugent